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Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature

Ergo decipiatur!

Edited by

Javier Martínez

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THE POET AND THE FORGER: ON NONNUS' FALSE BIOGRAPHY BY CONSTANTINE SIMONIDES

David Hernández de la Fuente

Two characters converge in the present article:* a poet and a forger. Nonnus of Panopolis, a Late Antiquity epic poet to whom the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John* are attributed, is hardly anything but a name for most of us.[1] His works are extensive and controversial: the great epic poem about Dionysus – the largest extant poem in Ancient Greek – and a complex epic version of the life of Christ, suffused with theological subtleties. Nevertheless, and despite recent attempts at shedding light on it, his life is still shrouded in mystery. Only a genial forger of the nineteenth century, Constantine Simonides, palaeographer and trader of icons and manuscripts, was able to come up with apocryphal data on the life of this poet, certainly in his most peculiar manner. This forger, about whom detailed studies have recently been published,[2] tricked erudite Germany (even the well-known philologist K.W. Dindorf fell into his clutches) and was on the brink of enticing Nonnus' nineteenth-century editor Count Marcellus, aristocratic philologist and retriever of Greek antiquities, with a false biography of Nonnus. In view of the exasperating and obstinate silence of the sources, the life of Nonnus could have only been recreated by a forger, and, shortly afterwards, by some historical fictions that will be briefly reviewed hereafter, namely, a short story by Richard Garnett and a novel by Margarete Riemschneider.

Constantine Simonides left a deep imprint in Greek studies at the beginning of the nineteenth century, at the time of European philhellenism, enthusiastic manuscript-purchasing campaigns, and heated competition for the editions of Greek Classics in Germany and France between publishing houses such as Tauchnitz-Teubner and Firmin-Didot and between academics from both countries. The long shadow of this

* This paper is based on research funded by project FFI2009–09465 of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.

[1] Cf., in general, Hernández de la Fuente 2008.

[2] E.g., Schaper 2011.

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rivalry still reaches us today, and is deeply felt, as the case of the Artemidorus papyrus attests.[3]

Simonides was born in the Aegean island of Syme, and from a very young age he was on good terms with members of the Greek Orthodox Church. He spent several years of his youth, from his ninteeth to his twenty-second year, in monasteries of Mount Athos, where he did his best to acquire knowledge and expertise in the Greek manuscripts held in the sacred Chalcidice peninsula.[4] Maybe his first forgeries, possibly practical exercises of palaeography at the very beginning, are also to be dated to this time, and also his first purchases of Byzantine manuscripts, with which he would start trading upon leaving the *Hagion Oros*. His privileged access to ancient parchments, which he could reuse imitating Byzantine palaeography, took him to Athens around 1846–49, where he would try to sell his false manuscripts as if they were authentic: among other treasures, he would offer fragments of the Gospels and Homeric poems, some of which he even tried to sell the new king of independent Greece. Putting forward as evidence his repeated stays in Mount Athos, Simonides claimed that he had found a large number of manuscripts in a secret store, containing, for example, works by Anacreon, Hesiod, and Homer, which he tried pass off as authentic in Athens. There was, however, no agreement about their authenticity, and he left the country. He arrived first to Istanbul, around 1850, where he continued with his counterfeiting activity, trying to sell manuscripts to local antiquarians. Simonides then traveled to England in 1853, where he sold some manuscripts to Sir Thomas Phillips (as reported by the journal of the time, *Athenaeum*, on 9 February 1857) and edited facsimiles of the Gospels whose originals he purported to date to a few years after the death of Christ. He then moved into France and Germany, offering to European dealers, libraries, and scholars manuscripts in a purportedly archaic handwriting; works by Sanchouniaton – an almost legendary Phoenician author of three lost works – and Homer, Aristotle's poetry and a purported history by Uranius, among others. Simonides was regarded as an expert in Greek literature and palaeography and had his say in all the scholarly polemics of the time such as, for example, the dating of Irenaeus of Lyon.

Simonides was denounced several times. The first time, in Istanbul, he was denounced by the German scholar A.D. Mordtmann, an expert

[3] Canfora 2010 and 2011. Canfora and Bossina 2008.
[4] On his life and deeds, Farrer 1907, 39 ff.

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in manuscripts, in an article published in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in Augsburg (1853) and echoed in the same year by Ludovico Lalanne in the journal *Athenaeum Français* (10 December, 1853). Apparently, and despite his bad name, some of his findings had been sensational. Simonides purported to have found *The Shepherd of Hermas* on Mount Athos and to have taken six copies to Europe; this forgery was included in an edition in Leipzig in 1856 by professor K.W. Dindorf.[5] It was also there that he sold his most notable forgery, Uranius' *Historia Aegyptiae*. Uranius was an author that Simonides dated to the fourth century of our era and whose manuscript he passed off as authentic with such success – he even convinced a commission of the Prussian Academy, endorsed by professors Boeckh and Lepsius – that the well-known philologist K.W. Dindorf, on behalf of the Prussian king, paid a substantial sum for it and began to prepare a critical edition of it in Leipzig. It was on the verge of being published, but the book was retrieved just in time from the printers after Professor Tischendorf and other scholars meticulously examined the purported *codex rescriptus* sold to Dindorf upon royal commissioning in view of the record of forgeries of Simonides in England. The matter of the false palimpsest gave rise to a famous scholarly polemic between Tischendorf and Lepsius about the authenticity of the manuscript, which led to an exchange of letters in the press and was later collected in a documented work on Simonides' Uranius.[6] A second article by Lalanne in *Athenaeum Français* (9 February, 1857), reporting on this very incident, accused him also of trying to sell several works, such as forty-seven comedies by Menander, an author only extant in fragments, Sophocles' complete plays, the full catalogue of the library of Alexandria, etc.; those interested were warned against Simonides. The whole issue ended, as Lalanne reported, with the arrest of Simonides in Leipzig and impounding of the sum of money he had received for the Uranius' palimpsest.

After having tricked cultivated Europe for years, in 1862 Simonides published an article in *The Guardian* newspaper in which he revealed himself as a forger and claimed to be the real author of the Codex Sinaiticus, the most ancient manuscript of the Bible, discovered by Tischendorf; he claimed to have written it during his youth. This lie and many others placed him under scrutiny by manuscript experts. At the end of the day, Simonides is still relevant today because the famous Artemidorus papyrus,

[5] Sandys 1910, v. 3.
[6] Fritzsche 1856.

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which contains what seems to be part of Book II of his *Geography*, is considered a forgery probably produced by Simonides himself by scholars such as Luciano Canfora.[7] The deeds of this master forger continued to the point of falsifying his own date of death in order to carry on with his activities, but an in-depth examination of this character's background and career should be the object of another article.

For the time being, we will focus on one of his most peculiar forgeries, in which he was trying to offer biographic information about specific authors, which roused great academic interest at the time. Simonides announced that he had discovered Demetrius' lost treaty *On Namesake Poets and Writers*. Demetrius of Magnesia is mentioned by Diogenes Laertius several times, as an author from the first century BC.[8] However, somewhat anachronistically, Simonides would show fragments of this purported sensational finding containing biographical data on Late Antiquity authors, such as Nonnus of Panopolis, from the fifth century AD, or the above-mentioned false Uranius.

Drawing on contemporary sources, Masson has dug into the particulars of Simonides' visit to France in 1854.[9] This French scholar mentions with a certain degree of admiration how, following the bad press that accompanied Simonides and despite the warnings made by Mordtmann and Lalanne,[10] the forger could still have access to the most relevant men of letters in France upon his arrival to Paris, and even captivate them with his mystifications. Among others, the writer Sainte-Beuve, who gave him recommendation letters to the Imperial Library in Paris, the Hellenist Ernest Beulé, the Secretary of the Academie Française, Abel Villemain, or even the Home Secretary, Hippolyte Fortoul. All these hosted and smothered him with their attentions in Paris. Among the scholars that Simonides was introduced to was Count Marcellus, a well-known character at the time, as specified by the biographer and supporter of Simonides, Charles Stewart,[11] for being one of the finders of the Venus de Milo. This character, Marie-Louis-Jean-André-Charles Demartin du Tyrac (1795–1865), full name of Count Marcellus, had a stellar political career from his admittance into the personal guard of the Duke of Angoulême until his diplomatic missions in Constantinople, Palestine, London and Madrid, either as Secretary of Embassy or even as Minister Plenipotentiary. Marcellus took part in

7 Parsons 2008, Canfora 2010 and 2011.
8 Diogenes Laertius I 112, V 3.
9 Masson, 1994, 370 ff.
10 Masson, 1994, 377.
11 Stewart, 1859, *apud* Masson, 1994, 372.

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1820 in the unearthing of the Venus de Milo together with the adventurer Dumont D'Urville, subsequently purchasing her on behalf of the Marquis de la Rivière to present to Louis XVIII. In the history of classical studies, this multifaceted Hellenist and aristocratic diplomat from the time of the Bourbon Restoration is well-known for having published in 1856 the first translation of the *Dionysiaca* by Nonnus of Panopolis, alongside a critical edition of the text. It would be followed by the edition and translation of the *Paraphrase of the Gospel of John* by Nonnus, which meant that the complete works of this author were translated into a modern language for the first time. Nor should the literary dimension of Count Marcellus, however, be forgotten, since it led him to write two books of travels, *Souvenirs de l'Orient* (1839) and *Épisodes littéraires en Orient* (1851), full of anecdotes and tales, which were so much to the taste of the time.

The text and translation of the supposed biography of Nonnus of Panopolis run as follows:

> Ἀπάνθισμα περὶ ὁμωνύμων ποιητῶν καὶ συγγράφεων τοῦ Πανιερωτάτου καὶ Θεοπροβλήτου Μητροπολίτου Λιβύης, κυρίου Διονυσίου, τοῦ κατά κόσμον Δημητρίου Μάγνητος ἀπανθισθὲν ἔκ τε τῶν συγγραμμάτων Δημητρίου Μαιάνδρου, Δημητρίου Θαρσυκλέους, Δημητρίου Κλέωνος, τῶν ἐκ τῆς κατὰ Καρίαν Μαγνησίας, καὶ Καλλιμάχου Ἡρωδιανοῦ τοῦ Κυρηναίου, τοῦ τοὺς Πίνακας συνταξαμένου τῶν ἐν παιδείᾳ λαμψάντων.
>
> Νόννος Πλεονίππου, ὁ τῶν Διονυσιακῶν ποιητής, θέσει μὲν ἦν Πανοπολίτης, φύσει δὲ Ἡλιουπολίτης γεγονὼς κατὰ Κωνσταντῖνον τὸν Μέγαν. Διήκουσεν Ἀριστοκλέους Διδύμου τοῦ Ἀλεξανδρέως, ὅν καὶ διεδέξατο· ἔγραψε δὲ σὺν τοῖς Διονυσιακοῖς καὶ περὶ Αἰγυπτίων θεῶν ἐν βίβλοις δυωκαίδεκα, καί ὕμνους εἰς Ἀφροδίτην τεσσαράκοντα μέτρῳ Σαπφικῷ· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ὑπὸ Σεραπίωνος ἐπισκόπου τῆς κατ' Αἴγυπτον Θμωίδος κατηχηθείς, καὶ πρὸς Ἀθανάσιον γενόμενος τὸν Ἀλεξανδρείας, καὶ τούτῳ μαθητεύσας μικρὸν, τὸν παλαιὸν ἀπεκδύεται ἄνθρωπον τῷ βαπτίσματι, καὶ Πανοπολιτῶν ἱερατεύει ἐπὶ ἔτη τριάκοντα πρὸς τοῖς ἑπτὰ, καὶ τὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγέλιον ἐπικῷ παραφράζει μέτρῳ καὶ Ἡσαίαν καὶ Ἱερεμίαν τοὺς προφήτας. ἀσθενείαι δὲ καμών ἐτελεύτησεν ἐν τῷ τεσσαρακαιδεκάτῳ ἔτει τῆς Βασιλείας Θεοδοσίου τοῦ [νεωτέρου] βιοὺς ὅλα ἔτη ὀγδοήκοντα πρὸς τοῖς δύω.
>
> Ἐγένοντο δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι Νόννοι δύω. Πρῶτος ὁ Θάχιδος Αἰγύπτιος τὸ γένος, καὶ οὗτος ἐξ Ἀρύπης πόλεως, μικρόν τοῖς χρόνοις πρεσβύτερος τοῦ Πανοπολίτου ὅς καὶ τὰ Αἰγυπτίων ἐν ἑπτὰ ἐκωμῴδησε, βίβλοις ἐμμέτρῳ λόγῳ γελοῖα ἐπιγράψας αὐτὰ. Δεύτερος ὁ Ἀρώχεως, Ἀνυσίτης τὸ γένος, τοὐπίκλην φιλόσοφος, καὶ Ὠριγένει γνώριμος. Ἔγραψε φιλόσοφα καὶ Αἰγυπτίων σοφῶν διατριβὰς. ἐτελεύτα δὲ μικρὸν πρὸ τῆς τοῦ Ὠριγένους τελευτῆς ὑπέργηρως πάνυ.
>
> Anthology about namesake poets and writers edited by Dionysus, bishop of Libya, most beloved and righteous to the Lord, whose worldly name was Demetrius of Magnesia. Compiled from the writings of Demetrius, son of Menander, Demetrius, son of Tharsicles, Demetrius, son of Cleon, all from the city of Magnesia, in Caria, and from the writings of Callimachus of

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> Cyrene, son of Herodianus, who composed the *Pinakes*, and of those who have shone in erudition.
>
> Nonnus, son of Pleonippus, the poet of the *Dionysiaca*, lived in Panopolis but was originally from Heliopolis, and was born in the times of Constantine the Great. He was a disciple of Aristocles Didymus of Alexandria, whom he also succeeded in his school. He wrote, as well as the *Dionysiaca*, twelve books about the gods of Egypt and forty hymns to Aphrodite, in Sapphic verse. After this, he was catechized by Serapion, bishop of Thmois in Egypt and afterwards by Athanasius of Alexandria. After a short time as disciple of the latter, he left his old self behind through baptism. He exercised his ministry in Panopolis for thirty-seven years. He paraphrased in epic verse the Gospel of John and the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. After falling ill, he died in the fourteenth year of the reign of Theodosius the Young, having lived a total of eighty-two years.
>
> There were two other Nonnus. The first one, of Egyptian race, was the son of Thachis and originally from the city of Arype, a few years older than the one from Panopolis. This one ridiculed Egyptian uses and wrote his humorous works in seven books in verse. The second one, son of Arocheus, from the city of Anysis, was called "the philosopher" and was acquainted with Origen. He wrote philosophy and the *Disputations of the Egyptian sages.* He died shortly before the death of Origen, at a very advanced age.

This falsification in grandiose mode truthfully imitates the style of short Late Antiquity biographies, in the fashion of grammarians and biographers like Eunapius of Sardis or later Byzantine lexicons. It is made as only a expert forger could do, interweaving the right doses of fantasy and real data. The fact that Marcellus had been immersed for a long time in the elaboration of a great work on Nonnus was known in various circles, both in England and in France. In a couple of articles in the journal *Athenaeum*, in its French version, there are reports of Marcellus' progress, and fragments of his translation of the *Dionysiaca* had also been published.[12] It is not far-fetched to imagine that Simonides knew of Marcellus' interest in Nonnus when he made public the news that he had a manuscript with the biography of the poet. Marcellus relates in a letter dated to 17 February, 1856 how one day, during a stay of Simonides in Paris, they were talking about the difficulties the French philologist was encountering in establishing a chronology for Nonnus and his works when the Greek forger told him that he thought he remembered that in one of his manuscripts he had read a biography of the author of the *Dionysiaca*. Marcellus, who, at that time, according to his own account, had no doubts about the authenticity

[12] *Athenaeum Français* 1855, 164 and 1857, 80.

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of Simonides' material, asked him enthusiastically to send it to him: fifteen days later he received the copy and ascertained that there were serious chronological inaccuracies in the text. He told Simonides that he would not be using the biography for his edition since he suspected it to be a forgery. Simonides, according to Marcellus, "received my statement without any apparent embarrassment and, making use of that particular phlegm that never abandoned him, did not press the matter any further." The quotation, reflecting the literal words of the Hellenist showing his surprise at the forger's boldness, is taken from the letter included in the above-mentioned study by Masson. The issue of Nonnus' biography was mentioned, finally, in an article entitled "Literary Forgery" published in the journal *Athenaeum*, in its English version, on 16 February, 1856, in which references were also made to the dubious business of Simonides in Leipzig.

The false biography, as we mentioned, is remarkable, despite its inaccuracies, already pointed out by Marcellus and Masson. All the Demetriuses quoted at the beginning are made up, with the exception of Demetrius of Magnesia quoted by Diogenes Laertius. There is a certain degree of ambiguity regarding the authorship of the fragment, which we shall briefly examine later on. But the attested name of the poet and scholar Callimachus of Cyrene, author of the tables or catalogue of authors of the library of Alexandria, is then inserted. However, the name of the father of Callimachus, Herodianus, is also an invention, since his name was Battus, according to tradition. The same could be said about Nonnus' supposed father, Pleonippus. The forger Simonides is extremely cautious with the characters mentioned, and carries on amalgamating reality and fiction in a skilled pastiche. The person supposedly responsible for the conversion of pagan Nonnus to Christianity is none other than Serapion, a historical character born at the end of the third century and bishop of Thmois around 340. Several treatises on psalms and against Manicheans are attributed to this Christian scholar, labelled "scholastic," aside from gospel paraphrases that would draw him closer to the Nonnus of the *Paraphrase of John*. There is in the work another well-known character, Athanasius of Alexandria (296–373), patriarch and famous author of the life of Saint Anthony the Great. Simonides bases his sham on real data about the time, since Photios mentions the relationship between Serapion and Athanasius, telling how the latter used to present his writings to the wise bishop of Thmois for their correction.

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The forger researched mostly real cities for the geography of Nonnus' life. Panopolis and Heliopolis are well known. Heliopolis is said to be his place of origin, while he had become famous for his long stay, more than thirty years, in Panopolis. Alexandria, where the poet says he is writing – "across from the island of Pharos" – seems to be the place where he studied. There he followed the pagan teachings of the sage Aristocles Didymus, perhaps following the model of Hierocles, Neoplatonist master in Alexandria, and his successor, Hypatia. It is worth noting the works of the pagan period attributed to Nonnus, apart from the *Dionysiaca*: a work in twelve books about the gods of Egypt and forty hymns to Aphrodite. Maybe the forger took into account not only the Panopolis poet's predilection for religious hymns, with which he interspersed his work dedicated to Dionysus, including some dedicated to Aphrodite,[13] but also the substantial length of his pagan work, the *Dionysiaca*, in forty-eight books. His conversion to Christianity is nicely embellished: he places it in Thmuis, one of the cities of Egypt noted by Herodotus, and site of the ancient bishopric where Serapion held office.

The false biography mentions, furthermore, several new Christian works by Nonnus that would have astonished his French editor: the paraphrases of prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, which corresponded to the paraphrases in fashion at the time such as Apollinaris of Laodicea's paraphrase of the psalms. Finally, the list of poets and writers also called Nonnus in the apocryphal fragment deserves special mention: there is a Nonnus of Aripe, son of Thachis, a Christian author of writings ridiculing Egyptian paganism. Of course, he is pure fabrication. His city, Arype, is mentioned by Stephanus of Byzantium, but his location in Egypt is erroneous and should have been in continental Greece. The third Nonnus, son of Arochus, is from the city of Anysis, also mentioned by Herodotus in his description of Egypt, like Thmuis. He is described as a pagan or converted philosopher from the time of Origen. Maybe these two false Nonnuses were simply a splitting of the poet into a homonymous pair polarized as pagan and Christian.

Finally, the chronological mistakes in the false biography's chronology of Nonnus are obvious. The main problem arises from placing his birth "around [κατά] the time of Constantine the Great." Indeed, it is stated that he dies in the fourteenth year of the reign of Theodosius II (408–450),

[13] Cf. Braun 1915. *The Hymn to Aphrodite* is in *Dion*. XLI 315 f., although interrupted by a lacunae.

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i.e., in 422. But it is also said that he was 82 at the time of his death, which would mean that he had been born in 340, this is, three years after the death of Constantine I (337). Unless this κατά can indicate an approximate value, the arithmetic is wrong. In any case, Nonnus' chronology is usually set between the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the earthquake that destroyed Beirut in 551 due to the reference made to the poet by Agathias of Myrina (530–582).[14] However, the most monumental mistake of all, and particularly eye-catching, is, of course, pretending that the scholar who wrote *On Namesake Poets and Writers*, dated by Diogenes Laertius to the first century BC, made any comments about such a Late Antiquity author as Nonnus.

In spite of that, one must acknowledge a genial touch in Nonnus' apocryphal biography by Simonides, for it includes a shrewd ambiguity regarding precisely the chronology of the namesake Demetriuses. He speaks of a work *On Namesake Poets and Writers* (Περὶ ὁμωνύμων ποιητῶν τε καὶ συγγραφέων), which is attributed by Diogenes Laertius (fl. 3rd century AD) to a Demetrius of Magnesia on Maeander, a grammarian and biographer of the first century BC: concretely in *Vita*e *Philosophorum* I 112 (ἀλλὰ Δημήτριος ὁ Μάγνης ἐν τοῖς Περὶ ὁμωνύμων ποιητῶν τε καὶ συγγραφέων…) and V 3 (… ὥς φησι Δημήτριος ὁ Μάγνης ἐν τοῖς Περὶ ὁμωνύμων ποιητῶν τε καὶ συγγραφέων).[15] Demetrius of Magnesia is also referred to[16] by Cicero, who was his contemporary: according to Cicero (*Ad Atticum* VIII 11, IV 11), Demetrius was author of a work *On Concord* (Περὶ ὁμονοίας), which he sent to Atticus and which Cicero was eager to read. But Simonides here shrewdly presents this work not as Demetrius' Περὶ ὁμωνύμων ποιητῶν τε καὶ συγγραφέων itself, but as an anthology edited by a seemingly Byzantine or Late Antique bishop of Libya, whose worldly name is Demetrius of Magnesia and who is compiling the anthology from the writings of two other Demetriuses of Magnesia and the writings of Callimachus. This manoeuvre would allow a margin of doubt; we can imagine the hesitation of Le Comte de Marcellus.

Undoubtedly Simonides, seeking to satisfy both the scholarly and literary interests of Marcellus in Nonnus, had composed a short and plausible biography for the poet from Panopolis that at long last unravelled the mystery of his double work, pagan and Christian, and provided a reasonable

[14] Cf. in general, Vian's introduction, Vian 1976.
[15] Cf. also FHG IV 382.
[16] Cf. v. gr. Plutarch, *Vit. Demosth*. 15, 27, 28, 30.

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chronology. In spite of the obvious mistakes and forgeries, the strategy of multiplying the personality of Demetrius of Magnesia was simply brilliant. In elegant style the scholarly author of a work *On Namesake Poets and Writers* is divided into three namesake grammarians as if reflected in a "game of mirrors," that would have amused Jorge Luis Borges. Simonides' forgery is without a doubt a work of genius. Nonetheless, he could not fool the meticulous French Hellenist as he had tricked his critics at the Academy of Berlin.

On the other hand, it should be remembered that, in the mid-nineteenth century, the interest in historical novels set in the ancient world, particularly in Late Antiquity, was at its height. Historical fictions written during the last decades of the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth often described controversial or little known characters from the last centuries of antiquity. Such was the case, for example, with Hypatia of Alexandria; she is little more than a name to us, but was enormously popular due to the story of her death at the hands of Christian monks popularized by Gibbon in *Decline and Fall*. This work was heavily biased against the Catholic Church, and for this story Gibbons relies on late authors such as Socrates Scholasticus. The English Anglican priest Charles Kingsley (1819–1875), author of the well-known historical novel *Westward Ho!* (1855) made her famous in his fiction work *Hypatia*, published in 1853, exactly at the time Simonides was in England. A possible influence of this newly-developed interest in the final years of conflict between paganism and Christianity should not be completely overlooked in the creation of these apocryphal works on Uranius and Nonnus.

Aside from the fictitious biography of Nonnus made up by Simonides, there were, from this time onwards, several attempts to recreate, in literary form, the life of such a curious character, who exemplified as few others could the symbiosis between paganism and Christianity in Late Antiquity and who could well compete with Hypatia as a protagonist of a novel about that time. The first author who treated Nonnus from a literary perspective was Richard Garnett (1835–1906), librarian of the British Library. Garnett was an extremely cultivated man and a voracious reader who worked from 1851 until his retirement in 1899 in the huge room that constituted the British Library, at the time still part of the British Museum. Most likely Garnett included Nonnus among his preferred readings. We do not know if he had access to Simonides' forged biography that so fascinated Marcellus, but he surely knew the Marcellus' translations. Chapter XVII "The Poet from Panopolis" in Garnett's first literary work, the

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book *The Twilight of the Gods* (1888), is devoted to the controversial character of Nonnus. This recreation of Nonnus' life is quite amusing: Nonnus is presented in his native Thebaid competing for the bishopric of Panopolis with an angry and unwashed anchorite and having to decide between Dionysus and Saint John. Needless to say, this is a conversion narrative, and, once again, the *Dionysiaca* are made typical of his youthful paganism while the more serious *Paraphrase* come from his later role as a respectable member of the Christian clergy. It is, ultimately, an ingenious story with Nonnus about to be appointed bishop (anticipating, perhaps, Enrico Livrea's modern theory on the identification of Nonnus with a namesake bishop of Edessa),[17] and hesitating between burning his pagan works and accepting his ecclesiastical dignity, in a sort of ordeal. Garnett presents an interesting fictional reenactment to deal with the difficult relation between the *Dionysiaca* and the *Paraphrase*, works by the same author: in the end, according to this fiction, Nonnus will be fated to publish both works, sowing doubts in the minds of scholars of centuries to come.

The twentieth century produced another literary work based on the fictitious biography of Nonnus of Panopolis. This is a work of fiction by the German Historian Margarete Riemschneider, born in Königsberg in 1899. Riemschneider was a prestigious scholar of antiquity in Eastern Germany, author of several monographs on Homeric questions, ancient religions, Orientalism, etc., and also of several reference articles on Nonnus of Panopolis, published in journals of the Eastern Bloc. Her other role as literary creator is attested in a series of historical novels that enjoyed a certain degree of popularity in the former German Democratic Republic.[18] Her historical fictions deal with topics from the ancient East to the life of Erasmus of Rotterdam, and include titles as stimulating as *Der Schwur des Espaini. Ein Roman aus dem alten Urartu* (1966), *Das Wunder von Jerusalem. Historischer Roman aus der Zeit Sanheribs* (1967). In 1970 she published the novel *Im Garten Claudias*, dedicated to the life of Nonnus of Panopolis, which bears as subtitle *Roman über den letzten Großen Dichter der Antike*. In line with Simonides and Garnett, Riemschneider also makes Nonnus a literary character, a character in a historical fiction, reflecting the fascination arising in those who enter into contact with the mysteries surrounding the life of the Panopolitan. The eventful

[17] Livrea 1987 and 2003.
[18] Schregel 1991.

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life of Ammonius-Nonnus, and his ultimate conversion from paganism to Christianity, is narrated in this novel set in the last years of the Western Empire, in which a prominent role is played by the imperial envoy Stilicho, the famous Stilicho of Vandal father and Roman mother, as well as by the terrible Barbaric invasions of the fourth and fifth centuries.

We see how both the forger and the novelists coincide in turning the conversion of the poet Nonnus into a key element of his biography in order to explain the apparently contradictory slant of his works. Nowadays we know that the *Paraphrase* was prior to the *Dionysiaca* and it is usually considered the result of an eclectic period of his life.[19] The false biography of Nonnus raised Marcellus' hopes for finding some truth about the last great poet of antiquity; but fiction seems, still today, to be the only means to investigate the life of this author.

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[19] On the former, cf. Livrea 1989, introd., 20 ff. on the latter, again Vian 1976 and Hernández de la Fuente, 2008. For a recent overall survey of Nonnus, cf. Shorrock 2011.

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